Mountain Training

Rock Climbing Instructor

Candidate handbook

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Preface

This handbook has been designed to support candidates through Mountain Training's Rock Climbing Instructor qualification. It contains useful information about the various stages in the qualification as well as the syllabus and guidance notes.

Participation statement

Mountain Training recognises that walking, climbing, and mountaineering are activities that have associated risks. Mountain Training provides training and assessment courses and guidance to help instructors develop the skills to manage the risks associated with the environment in which they operate and to enable new participants to have positive experiences.

All instructors owe a heightened duty of care to the people they instruct, their colleagues, and the wider public who may be impacted by the instructor's actions.

Mountain Training qualified instructors will act in the best interests of their group, individual group members and others, and they will always act within their competence to prevent harm to them.

Acknowledgements

Mountain Training would like to thank all the staff members and volunteers involved in the Climbing Awards Review 2014-2016.

Thanks also to the following individuals whose photographs bring the handbook to life: Alan Halewood, Alex Messenger, Charlie Low, Guy Jarvis, John Cousins, Karl Midlane, Mike Hutton, NICAS and Outdoor Adventure North West.

Rock Climbing

Throughout this handbook there are references to Rock Climbing by Libby Peter which we publish to support developing rock climbers and instructors. It is packed with essential information and techniques and we have listed the relevant chapter(s) for each syllabus area.

1. Qualification pathway

1.1 Introduction

The Rock Climbing Instructor qualification enables experienced rock climbers to instruct climbing on single pitch crags and artificial climbing walls and towers in the UK and Ireland.

1.2 Scope of the qualification

A qualified instructor can:

- Teach climbing skills.
- Take people climbing, bouldering and abseiling
- Manage groups safely in these activities.

1.2.1 Terrain

A qualified Rock Climbing Instructor can operate on:

- Single pitch* trad and sport crags.
- Indoor and outdoor bouldering venues.
- Climbing walls and towers.

*See Appendix 1 for a definition of a single pitch crag.

1.2.2 Exclusions

The qualification does not cover:

- General mountaineering.
- Multi-pitch rock climbing.
- The supervision or teaching of lead climbing.
- Access to tidal sea cliffs or any other location where retreat is not easily possible.
- The supervision of high and low ropes courses.

1.3 Stages in the qualification

1.3.1 Registration prerequisites

- You must be at least 18 years old.
- You must be an experienced indoor and outdoor rock climber.
- You must have a genuine interest in climbing and the supervision of groups.
- You must be a member of a mountaineering council (British Mountaineering Council, Mountaineering Ireland, Mountaineering Scotland)

1.3.2 Training prerequisites

- You must be registered on the qualification.
- You must have an up to date logbook (preferably DLOG) with evidence of the following:
  - 15 led routes which must be graded rock climbs with traditional protection.
  - 15 led routes at a climbing wall.
  - 5 led routes which must be outdoor bolt protected sport climbs.

Up to 50% of this experience can be from outside the UK and Ireland.

1.3.3 Consolidation period

Climb at a wide range of venues and on a variety of rock types, both as an individual and when assisting with the supervision of others.

All but the most experienced candidates should allow a minimum of six months between training and assessment.

There is currently no time limit on the validity of a training course and some candidates may take several years to complete the qualification.

Mountain Training Association

Our association can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications. We are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

1.3.4 Assessment prerequisites

- You must have completed a Rock Climbing Instructor (or Single Pitch Award) training course or been granted exemption from training.
- You must be familiar with the syllabus.
- You must be competent leading Severe grade climbs on outdoor crags with leader-placed protection.
- You must have led a minimum of 40 graded rock climbs with traditional protection at a variety of venues (of which at least 20 MUST be at Severe grade or above).
- You must be proficient in the use of climbing walls and have a minimum of 30 climbing wall leads at grade 4/F4 or above.
- You must be proficient in outdoor bolt protected sport climbing and have a minimum of 10 sport climb leads at grade 4/F4 or above.
- You must have assisted in the supervision of 20 instructed sessions. These sessions should be at a variety of different venues with 10 being on indoor climbing walls and the other 10 on outdoor crags. A session is a half day or evening. At least five of these sessions must have personal reflective comments recorded on DLOG.
- You must have a current first aid certificate, gained by completing an in-person (not online) course which involved at least two full days of instruction, or equivalent, and included an element of assessment.

2. Course structure

2.1 Training

Training will involve a minimum of 24 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of 3 days, with 8 hours in a climbing wall.

Providers may offer a dedicated minimum 16 hours contact time Rock Climbing Instructor training course for candidates who have attended a Climbing Wall Instructor (or Climbing Wall Award) training or assessment.

2.2 Assessment

Assessment will involve a minimum of 16 hours contact time delivered over a minimum of 2 days with at least 4 hours delivered at an indoor climbing wall.

Results: Pass, Defer, Fail, Not yet completed, Withdrew, Did not show.

There is no exemption from any element of the assessment.

Practical reassessments cannot take place within three months of the initial assessment to allow sufficient time for practice and preparation. All deferral reassessments must be completed within five years of the original assessment. Candidates may undertake two short reassessments after a defer result. Subsequently a full assessment must be undertaken.

3. Course delivery

3.1 Training

Course director must hold the Rock Climbing Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Additional staff must be Rock Climbing Instructor (or Single Pitch Award) or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Min. course size: 2, max. course size: 8, max. ratio: 1:4

3.2 Assessment

Course directors must hold the Rock Climbing Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements.

Additional staff must hold the Rock Climbing Development Instructor or higher plus national Mountain Training organisation requirements..

Min. course size: 2, max. course size: 8, max. ratio: 1:4.

4. Awarding organisations

- Mountain Training Board Ireland
- Mountain Training Cymru
- Mountain Training England
- Mountain Training Scotland

Syllabus and guidance notes

Technical competence

Rock Climbing Instructors will be able to identify and evaluate commonly used climbing equipment and demonstrate its use to individuals during a climbing session. They will be personally competent in a range of climbing techniques and be able to provide clear demonstration and effective tuition to novice climbers. They will be able to:

1. Equipment

1.1 Select and fit suitable climbing equipment for personal and group use.

1.2 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of personal climbing equipment and ensure appropriate use, care and maintenance in line with manufacturer's guidance.

1.3 Demonstrate an ability to evaluate the condition of climbing wall equipment and ensure appropriate use of:

1.3.1 In-situ ropes

1.3.2 Auto-belays

1.3.3 Fixed matting

1.3.4 Holds, features and volumes

1.3.5 Anchors/lower offs and fixed equipment

Guidance

A sound knowledge of equipment is important for a Rock Climbing Instructor because it is an integral element of climbing safely. Misuse of climbing equipment can have dangerous consequences. As an instructor you are also likely to offer advice to novices on choice and suitability of equipment which cannot be done well if you do not have appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Equipment manufacture involves thorough testing and the need to comply with agreed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standards. While familiarising yourself with various pieces of equipment you should learn to recognise these standards and understand why manufacturers give guidance on appropriate use and care.

Chapter 6 Technical essentials

Key practice points

- Practise fitting a range of different helmets and harnesses. Research why there may be differences in the overall design or features.
- Take time to familiarise yourself with your own equipment by reading the manufacturer's guidance label each time you buy a new piece of kit.
- Discuss equipment choice with a range of decision makers (e.g. wall managers, qualified instructors, experienced climbers) to help develop your understanding.
- Be aware of particular requirements of the individuals to ensure all can participate e.g. headwear under helmets.

2. Anchors

2.1 Select suitable, sound anchors in a variety of situations. Anchors to include:

- 2.1.1 Spikes and blocks.
- 2.1.2 Nuts and camming devices.
- 2.1.3 Threads, chockstones and trees.
- 2.1.4 Fixed equipment including:
  - 2.1.4.1 A variety of different bolts.
  - 2.1.4.2 Stakes and other anchors placed in the ground
  - 2.1.4.3 Climbing wall anchors

2.2 Set up single and multiple anchors for a belay and attach themselves securely.

Guidance

Sound anchor choice is a fundamental skill for any Rock Climbing Instructor and it is therefore important that you develop the skills to evaluate them whilst utilising a safe and efficient system.

Candidates need to demonstrate that they can attach themselves to single and multiple anchors in a logical and safe way which makes the anchors independent, equally loaded and with their stance (sitting or standing) best suited to the situation.

Chapter 9 Top-rope climbing and abseiling

Key practice points

- Develop an understanding of what makes a safe placement when selecting anchors and consider using a scoring system to rate its quality.
- Research how fixed equipment (bolts, lower-offs and climbing wall hand-holds) is placed and develop a method for checking the suitability of these.
- Visit a variety of different rock types to broaden your understanding of different rock features and how this then relates to the placing of anchors.
- Experiment with different anchors in the same location to consider which is the most appropriate option and to improve your efficiency.

3. Belaying

3.1 Tie into the rope. Attach group members to the rope.

3.2 Demonstrate the use of indirect and direct belay systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.

3.3 Set up top/bottom-rope systems and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.

3.4 Demonstrate the skills of a competent belayer including holding falls and controlling lowers.

3.5 Supervise others belaying.

3.6 Attach self and others to the belay system and abseil ropes.

Guidance

The broad experience requirements for entering the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification assume that candidates are well practised with a variety of different belaying methods and techniques. Belaying is a crucial element of roped climbing and belayer error is a potential cause of serious accidents.

Your personal competence and ability to supervise others in this task is therefore of the utmost importance. You also need to understand how the position of the belayer may affect the forces they feel in the event of a fall.

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 9 Top-rope climbing and abseiling

Key practice points

- Familiarise yourself with a range of different manual and assisted braking belay devices and understand their use and application.
- Develop an effective method for demonstrating how to tie onto the rope and how to belay to a group of novices.
- Practise different belaying methods suitable for use with a group of novices.

- Be aware of the interaction between different ropes, karabiners and belay devices. Alongside the belayer's experience this should inform your choice of equipment used.

4. Personal climbing skills

4.1 In a safe, competent and assured manner whilst demonstrating good technique:

4.1.1 Choose and lead single pitch, Severe and F4 grade rock climbs.

4.1.2 Choose and climb boulder problems suited to personal ability.

4.2 Demonstrate the skills of a competent second.

4.3 Interpret guidebooks effectively.

4.4 Demonstrate a basic understanding of the safety chain and fall factors.

Guidance

Your personal skills underpin your actions as a Rock Climbing Instructor. The experience requirements for the qualification are listed as a minimum; therefore any additional experience you gain will only contribute towards your overall development.

When lead climbing you must assure yourself the belayer is competent to do so. This will

likely involve consideration being given to their past experience and careful observation of their belaying, whilst maintaining good visual and verbal communication throughout.

Chapter 10 Sport climbing

Chapter 11 Trad climbing

Key practice points

- Climb at a variety of different venues and on different rock types around the UK and Ireland to help broaden your knowledge.
- Climb with different people to seek out new or alternative climbing styles.

5. Abseiling

5.1 Abseil without requiring a back-up safety rope.

5.2 Demonstrate methods of safeguarding a novice abseiling.

5.3 Use common devices for abseiling competently and choose the most appropriate for a given situation.

Guidance

Abseiling is a fundamental skill of a Rock Climbing Instructor. You may need to personally abseil for a variety of reasons which may include: retrieving equipment, to reach the ground following rigging climbs, assist a client in difficulty or to respond to an incident on the crag.

Abseiling is also commonly considered an activity in its own right which means you need to be able to support and safeguard novice participants. A well set up system ensures participants enjoy the activity and avoids problems occurring.

Chapter 9 Top-rope climbing and abseiling

Key practice points

- Practise rigging a personal abseil, ensuring that the anchors are sound and equalised.
- Practise using a prusik back-up at ground level to help you understand its limitations and how it performs when loaded.
- Develop your own safety checklist for abseiling.
- Practise rigging abseils for novice groups at various crags to develop your awareness of issues such as the approach to and from the site.

6. Background knowledge

6.1 Demonstrate an awareness of the history, traditions and ethics of climbing in the UK and Ireland.

6.2 Explain the role and philosophy of Mountain Training and its qualifications, the mountaineering councils, climbing clubs and NICAS.

6.3 Describe the grading systems used in the UK and Ireland.

Mountain Training

The network of awarding organisations who administer skills courses and leadership qualifications. Approved providers deliver the courses.

Mountaineering councils

The councils protect the interests of walkers, climbers and mountaineers and the cliffs, hills and mountains they enjoy.

Mountain Training Association

Mountain Training's membership association providing support and development opportunities for trainee and qualified candidates.

Guidance

Candidates enrolling onto the Rock Climbing Instructor qualification will be mountaineering council members. This gives access to a wide range of climbing resources which are valuable in starting the process of awareness of history, tradition, ethics and developments.

Guidebooks can also be an important source of information for rock climbers. In addition to route identification details, history and background and important access and environmental notes are contained within most guidebooks.

Chapter 1 A brief history of UK and Irish climbing

Key practice points

- Explore the Mountain Training website to gain a greater understanding of its role and relationship with other key organisations such as the mountaineering councils.
- Develop an understanding of the UK and Irish trad grading system, bouldering grades and sport/indoor climbing grade systems.
- Familiarise yourself with Mountain Training's Rock Skills courses and NICAS

Management and decision-making

Rock Climbing Instructors should be able to independently organise, plan, manage and deliver climbing and bouldering sessions to a wide range of participants, often with support from an assistant. They should be able to:

7. Instructor responsibilities

7.1 Explain their general responsibilities to the group and, where appropriate, to parents/guardians, the organising authority, committee or manager of the activity, facility users, environmental agencies, local residents, landowners and the general public.

7.2 Explain their specific responsibilities to choose appropriate aims and objectives, to complete detailed preparations and ensure that the group is adequately equipped and briefed for the activity.

7.3 Demonstrate an understanding of current legislation and the legal responsibilities that relate to the duty of care to individuals and groups under their charge, including safeguarding issues specific to supervising young people and vulnerable adults.

7.4 Demonstrate an awareness of the variety of barriers to participation, including mental and physical disability, ethnicity, fitness/health and be aware of the impact of various medical conditions.

7.5 Describe how to access national guidance on instructor responsibilities and good practice.

7.6 Be able to evaluate the experience and signpost towards further participation.

Guidance

As a climbing instructor you have a clear duty of care to your groups, the level of which will vary according to the group members' age and experience. You owe a greater duty of care when you are acting in loco parentis with people under eighteen years of age. The climbing environment presents hazards that may not be apparent to novice climbers, so participants and parents of children participating in this activity should be made aware of and accept these risks.

Many of your responsibilities as an instructor will be identified through preparation and planning and will likely include: parental consent (if participants are under 18), authority clearance (if required), personal and medical information, finances, insurance and transport. Employing/deploying organisations such as schools, Scouts, Girlguiding and local education authorities will have their own procedures in place to ensure that appropriate preparation has been undertaken. Your understanding of and ability to adapt to these procedures and underlying principles will enable you to independently prepare appropriate climbing activities.

The ability to prepare and motivate any group prior to the activity is important and you should seek opportunities to assess the participants in terms of their physical abilities as well as any equipment needs. If needed, a progression of climbs and venues may be used to develop participants' fitness and personal capabilities.

Your position of responsibility extends beyond the activity itself and participants may look to you for guidance on how to continue climbing independently or to develop their skills further. A rounded knowledge of suitable opportunities is therefore very useful.

Outdoor rock climbing falls within the scope of the Adventurous Activity Licensing Regulations in England, Scotland and Wales. Candidates should be aware of the implications of this for any work they may undertake with those under 18.

Chapter 19 Incidents, accidents and getting help

Chapter 20 The law and risk management

Key practice points

- Explore what different organisations or employers expect from you as an instructor with regards to your responsibilities.
- Look at the AALA scope and regulations and work out how, when or if they might apply to you. An introduction to the regulations can be found here.
- Research opportunities for developing skills that might be suitable for a range of groups and individuals.

8. Leadership and decision-making

8.1 The leader demonstrates adaptable leadership behaviours and decision-making.

8.1.1 Monitor the group, environmental conditions and activity, and can adapt their behaviours and decisions to meet ongoing safety, group and task requirements.

8.1.2 Be consistent and confident in their decision making to achieve positive outcomes and communicate these clearly to the group.

8.2 VISION – The leader is a positive role model and aims to inspire others.

8.2.1 Articulate clear and agreed values for their group; lead by example; and behave how they want the group to behave.

8.3 SUPPORT – The leader creates a positive and supportive environment for the group.

8.3.1 Recognise, respect and adapt to individual needs, differences, strengths and abilities.

8.3.2 Encourage independent learning; establish an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities and provide clear and positive feedback to support this.

8.4 CHALLENGE – The leader provides relevant and appropriately challenging experiences.

8.4.1 Agree group goals and calibrate the level of challenge to individual abilities and motivations.

8.4.2 Encourage and support the group and individuals to be part of the decision-making process and encourage them to solve their own problems.

8.5 The leader understands the Mountain Training ethos of leadership and has developed their own. They should be able to:

8.5.1 Articulate their own leadership ethos and beliefs along with those of Mountain Training.

8.5.2 Acknowledge and describe a range of leadership approaches, models and associated ethos.

Guidance

Climbing instructors need to demonstrate the basic skills and decision-making of adaptive leadership. They should have a well-researched plan for their group which incorporates factors such as the groups' abilities and needs, the weather and climbing conditions (if the artificial wall is outdoors), as well as the climbing venue and intended climbs. What is most important is to match their leadership choices with the desired outcomes for the group.

In spite of the best made plans, things can and do change; the weather, the group, how busy the venue is, etc. A good instructor will notice, and be on the lookout for, these changes before a problem arises and adapt their approach accordingly. For example: if

the climbing wall is very busy, you may need to adapt the session to make use of available space.

There are seven components of leadership that contribute to the effectiveness of the instructor:

1. Instructor style: controlling versus non-controlling.

2. Decision making: what informs this and how to make them.

3. Instructor observations: what they should be and how to make them.

4. Instructor communication skills: verbal and non-verbal, listening.

5. Experience and ability: how this influences decision making.

6. Emotional intelligence: to support individuals

7. Group management: techniques, style and influences

Candidates should reflect on these when instructing groups and seek to develop them over their career.

Underpinning the role of an instructor are the values, beliefs, and ethos that shape every individual's view of what leadership should be. All instructors tend to have preferred behaviours (leadership styles) that are heavily influenced by these and their personality traits. Instructors will need to adapt their preferred behaviour to an appropriate set of actions required to balance the needs of both the situation and the group.

The 'Vision, Support, Challenge' model of transformational leadership provides a framework that instructors can use to plan, execute and review their leadership behaviours. In this way, groups who receive the right balance of the three categories can be encouraged to perform beyond their own expectations. Transformational leadership is a model of positive behaviours (known by the mnemonic INSPIRE) that instructors can use to promote the best outcomes for their groups:

Inspire and motivate your followers with a unified vision.

Nurture an environment of team-focused goals

Set the example you want to see in your followers.

Praise and give constructive feedback to help your followers develop.

Insist on setting high standards, relative to each individual.

Recognise and respond to each individual's needs.

Encourage followers to create and implement their own solutions.

Instructors need to develop trust amongst their group. This requires an appropriate balance of consultation, empathy and instruction to engineer success. Effective instructors will, for example, adapt the way they communicate to best suit their group and will give different degrees of responsibility to groups of varying ability and experience.

Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Chapter 20 The law & risk management

See also all Notes for instructors boxes

Key practice points

- Observe other instructors planning and delivering a session and review the decisions they made along the way. Why did they make those decisions? What would you have done?
- Make sure your group is ready to receive instruction when you need to give it – gather them together and make sure they are all looking at you before you speak.
- Challenge by choice. Calibrating and establishing agreed goals is the art of good leadership. Too low and they will become disengaged, too high and you will lose their trust.
- Praise in public, give constructive criticism in private. Call people aside if you need to challenge their behaviour, unless it was directed at someone else.
- Explain your thinking. Group members have a right to know why you are telling them to do something; but retain your authority.

9. Knowledge and demonstration of techniques

9.1 Deliver technical instruction to individuals and the group including:

- 9.1.1 Choice and fitting of suitable harnesses
- 9.1.2 Attaching the rope to the harness
- 9.1.3 Effective belaying
- 9.1.4 Abseiling.

9.2 Demonstrate the use of bouldering activities with groups, using appropriate games and activities, including setting simple boulder problems.

9.3 Teach and demonstrate fundamental climbing movement skills.

9.4 Supervise a group of novice climbers in the following activities:

- 9.4.1 Belaying and tying-in
- 9.4.2 Climbing
- 9.4.3 Bouldering
- 9.4.4 Abseiling

Guidance

Well thought out demonstrations, appropriate to the group, are essential for novices. To be able to give effective demonstrations you must ensure that you know your subject well and have practised demonstrating each skill, ideally with feedback and criticism. See also syllabus section 10 Teaching and learning skills.

Climbing games can be a great way of motivating groups and getting everybody involved at a level which suits them. Think about why you've chosen any games being used and how they relate to the aims of your session and desired outcomes.

Your training course will cover teaching movement skills so that your group can enjoy their climbing session to the full. The emphasis should be placed on getting individuals actively involved in the activity rather than their long-term development. For a more in-depth appreciation, consider attending a FUNdamentals of Climbing workshop delivered by the mountaineering councils and the Foundation Coach qualification, all of which will develop these skills in much greater depth.

Supervising roped climbing and bouldering requires excellent organisation skills, clear communication and constant vigilance. When the group is roped climbing, the belayers' actions and every connection in the safety chain will be the key focal points for the instructor. When the group are bouldering, minor injuries can be more prevalent, making risk assessment and structured session planning essential. You will need to know when and how to spot individuals to support their safety.

Some key components of effective instruction and supervision include:

- Safety briefing and warm-up, including boundaries for the group (height and descent style if bouldering, attention when belaying, activity areas, behaviour).
- Instructor 'position of most usefulness', where you can observe and support participants.
- Participant engagement though structured activities.
- Clear landing zones when bouldering. Also note: the instructor should be prepared to assist climbers during critical moments. Seek consent for any physical support of climbers.

Further guidance on supervising indoor and outdoor bouldering sessions can be found on our guidance page.

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 9 Top-rope climbing and abseiling

Chapter 11 Trad climbing

Key practice points

- Practise setting clear height boundaries when briefing a group about traversing, as ascent tends to be the human default setting.
- Observe experienced bouldering instructors – how do they encourage participants to climb down, hang and drop, rather than jump?
- Consider how your position of most usefulness will differ when the group are bouldering and roped climbing.
- Develop systematic ways of fitting helmets and harnesses. Watching experienced instructors working is the best way to do this. Instruction needs to be clear, concise and accompanied by flawless demonstration.

- Consider how you instruct individuals to belay. Your instruction should be applicable to the group and situation. Experiment with different devices and strategies to ensure you are able to cope in different circumstances. Also consider using assisted braking devices in the teaching progression.

10. Hazards and emergency procedures

10.1 Choose appropriate venues, activities and routes for group use considering:

10.1.1 Suitability of approach/descent

10.1.2 Terrain at the base of the crag

10.1.3 Objective dangers

10.2 Describe the hazards presented to other site users by the actions of a group and act to minimise these.

10.3 Demonstrate an understanding of warming up and injury avoidance techniques.

10.4 Avoid common roped climbing and abseiling problems.

10.5 Solve common problems if they occur.

10.6 In the case of an incident describe how to call for relevant assistance.

Guidance

Your choice of venues, activities, problems and routes can make or break your session and the ability to make those decisions is developed through knowledge and experience.

You must have a clear grasp of the principles of warming up. You need to have a range of activities in your repertoire so you can work effectively with a range of age groups and with people of differing levels of mobility.

In typical top and bottom roping situations roped problems are very rare. Focus on belaying and tying on to the rope as your first priority. Training and practising lowers low down on a route will prevent many issues. If you need extra security then a knot behind the belay plate, on the dead rope, will give you peace of mind whilst you consider your actions.

Given the prevalence of auto-belays in climbing walls and the unique nature of some of the incidents that have occurred, candidates should be familiar in identifying and mitigating common hazards such as snag hazards on the climber, helmet hangup, climber not clipping in to auto-belay, being lowered side on to the wall as well as not letting go of the auto-belay attachment karabiner until it is clipped back to its 'anchor'.

Problems should be foreseen and avoided by sound training, clear briefs and two-way communication. In an artificial structure context there is no need for a Rock Climbing Instructor to carry out rope rescues on the wall without further, site-specific, training.

Knowing how, who and when to call for help are crucial decisions for a Rock Climbing Instructor should an incident occur. Many crags are not easily accessible from the road, which may mean an ambulance cannot assist and you may need to engage alternative services. If assistance is required then you'll need to have sufficient equipment to support the casualty until help arrives.

Chapter 7 Indoor climbing

Chapter 12 Single pitch problem solving

Chapter 19 Incidents, accidents and getting help

Key practice points

- Research the approach and retreat from a crag in advance to help you manage your clients appropriately and to find out about any objective dangers which may be present

at the crag. What is the location of the crag? Make a note of the grid reference or the postcode of a nearby building. The guidebook may well have this information.

- Check the network availability for phone coverage at the crag in advance as part of your overall risk assessment.
- Research, using guidebooks and other resources, what emergency services are available in the area. It may be that the location of the crag requires a Mountain Rescue/Lowland Rescue team in an emergency rather than an ambulance.

11. Personal safety

11.1 Demonstrate appropriate methods of protecting themselves while operating at height during all activities.

Guidance

Rock Climbing Instructors will regularly spend time at the top of a crag in order to set up climbing/abseiling systems for their groups. As the nature and conditions of each crag are different, instructors can utilise a range of methods to ensure their safety.

These methods need to be carried out with commonly used climbing equipment, which may involve some level of improvisation. If single anchors are being used extreme care must be taken.

Key practice points

- Ensure that the anchor being used to safeguard the instructor is reliable.
- Experiment with adjusting different methods of safeguarding yourself that enable you to set up safely without putting yourself in a position where a fall can happen.
- Practise various methods on a range of different crags to develop an understanding of which approach will suit each scenario.

12. Managing/supervising other staff

12.1 Explain the role and scope of an assistant. Describe the opportunities and liabilities presented by using an assistant in a session.

12.2 Manage an assistant.

Guidance

An assistant is any person who supports an instructor in the delivery of their session but who does not direct or make decisions about the management of the session.

Assistants and other unqualified staff can be of enormous benefit to a session provided that they are managed appropriately (read our guidance on managing assistants). They can support the talented, those with individual requirements, their peers, or their own students and children, and can be powerful role models for the participants.

A qualified Indoor Climbing Assistant can help with clearly defined technical roles such as fitting personal climbing equipment, backing up belayers and managing a single bottom-rope climb. However, judgement about what activities are to be undertaken, and how they are to be managed, remains with the instructor. Do not overburden yourself and the assistant.

Assistants and other staff come with a wide range of experience and competencies and you are wholly responsible for assessing these. If in doubt you should not use an assistant and not be compelled to work with them either. By definition an assistant or an unqualified member of staff cannot work independently and you are responsible for the group and the actions of an assistant at all times. All assistant deployment should be risk assessed before each session begins.

It is essential that assistants are appropriately supervised by you, the instructor, so that there can be constant communication and guidance given.

It is not possible to give specific guidance on instructor/student ratios with assistants as this will vary with the situation. For example, a severely disabled climber may benefit from the support of two or more assistants working very closely with an instructor whilst a talented academy group may benefit from one qualified and experienced assistant working in sight of the instructor in a bouldering wall.

The qualified instructor remains ultimately responsible for the group and must always be in a position to intervene if necessary.

Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- Practise briefing an assistant about their role and remit.
- Practise maintaining a position of maximum effectiveness, keeping assistants within sight and easy communication at all times.
- Get into the habit of discussing your session with an assistant to give and receive feedback.

Teaching and learning skills

Rock Climbing Instructors will frequently need to give tuition and support to a range of climbers in a variety of climbing related techniques. They should be able to:

13. Teaching and learning skills

13.1 Demonstrate an ability to adapt the teaching style to meet group needs.

13.2 Identify and use appropriate tasks to develop effective and safe climbers.

13.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for evaluating a session and success of the outcome.

Guidance

Climbing Instructors need to quickly create an environment of trust and confidence within their group so that participants feel relaxed and comfortable to tackle new and challenging activities. Age, ability, individual requirements, confidence and energy levels amongst the group will require different approaches to achieve this.

Good communication skills are key. The ability to create rapport, communicate at an appropriate level, use positive language, provide a variety of demonstration techniques, check for understanding through skilled questioning and give useful feedback and encouragement to individuals are the foundations of effective teaching.

In addition to these communication skills effective teaching requires instructors to be able to observe and assess participants' abilities and confidence levels. They then need to calibrate the appropriate level of challenge and structure a task to stimulate and stretch the climber but not to intimidate or defeat them. Instructors also need to be adaptive in their approach. If a particular technique or activity is not working well then they should adapt their approach to better suit the needs of the group.

Remember that assistants can offer a valuable resource to support you with your teaching. Assistants are often connected with the group and will know much about their individual needs and potentially how best to deliver information to them.

All instructional sessions are different due to the nature of the group and the conditions of the day. Instructors should reflect upon the outcome of each session and consider changes of style or content that may improve the outcomes of the next one.

Chapter 13 Inspiring others

Key practice points

- Learn some effective games/activities to engage learners at the beginning of a session and to enable you to observe group dynamics.
- Make sure everyone can see and hear you clearly.
- Experiment with different ways of checking for understanding.
- Practise different delivery styles and think about when/with whom you might use them.

The climbing environment

Rock Climbing Instructors should be informed and experienced in a variety of climbing environments, such as the indoor climbing wall environment, including both small and large scale (commercial) venues; outdoor climbing venues, including both 'trad' and 'sport' climbing venues. They should have a broad knowledge of the issues and challenges affecting access and use of a variety of climbing areas. They should be able to:

14. Access

14.1 Source current access information and act accordingly.

Guidance

As a Rock Climbing Instructor you have a responsibility to respect landowners and facility managers with regards to access. As a minimum, any supervised group should conform to codes of good practice and comply with relevant access legislation, which may differ between the nations of the UK and Ireland along with local restrictions or guidelines.

Chapter 1: The climbing environment

Key practice points

- Source access information for a crag you've never visited before – be creative with your sources and check for the accuracy of the information.
- Research initiatives like 'Leave No Trace' and the work of the mountaineering councils' access teams.
- Research the differences in access legislation between England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

15. Conservation

15.1 Have a basic working knowledge of the rock climbing environment including geology and natural history.

15.2 Operate in such a way as to minimise impact on the environment.

15.3 Pass on basic environmental knowledge in an appropriate and engaging way to educate and enthuse.

15.4 Manage groups so that they have minimal impact and leave the crags in an improved condition where possible.

Guidance

General knowledge about the environment the group is visiting is always valuable. The history of the area combined with some basic knowledge of the land use, plants and animal life can illuminate the climbing experience for the participants and initiate a lifelong interest. As an instructor you are best placed to deliver this information to novices who may be unaware of the fragile ecosystem which supports climbing as an activity..

Key practice points

- Research the mountaineering councils' websites and publications for guidance on environmental, access and conservation information.
- Most guidebooks to crags will contain some information which should be checked before going climbing, even if it's a familiar site. This information should then be researched further online for any updates.
- Create some basic resources for your participants as a useful way for them to engage more with the environment.

16. Etiquette and ethics

16.1 Describe local rock climbing ethics related to single pitch crags.

16.2 Operate a flexible programme of activities so as to accommodate other site or facility users.

16.3 Describe the site-specific requirements and agreements relating to different crags, climbing walls and artificial structures.

Guidance

Good behaviour of climbers at crags and climbing walls can help maintain access and reduce friction between facility and landowners, which ultimately supports access. The same applies to instructors and their groups and their relationship with fellow climbers.

Instructors need to set a good example while supervising or climbing at a crag or wall.

Engaging with other facility users to find ways of minimising disruption between each other is a really good start, for example vacating routes as soon as you are finished instead of leaving ropes unattended. Make your group aware of other users too as at times you may not be directly supervising while you are engaged with other tasks such as setting up ropes on the top of a crag.

Chapter 1 The climbing environment

Chapter 2 A brief history of UK and Irish climbing

Key practice point

- Learn to avoid taking over whole sections of a crag/wall – it's usually better to split into smaller groups and spread out.

Appendix 1 - Definitions

Single pitch

For the purposes of this qualification, a single pitch route is one which:

- Is climbed without intermediate stances.
- Is described as a single pitch in the guidebook.
- Allows climbers to be lowered to the ground at all times.
- Is non-tidal and has little objective danger.
- Presents no difficulties on approach or retreat, such as route finding, scrambling or navigating.

Traditional protection

Traditional protection includes equipment such as cams, hexes and nuts which are placed in cracks and weaknesses in the rock by a lead climber as they climb. The protection is then clipped to the rope using a quickdraw.

Appendix 2 - Additional information

Personal reflective comments

Mountain Training presently requires assessment candidates to have reflective comments recorded in DLOG for the Rock Climbing Instructor, Climbing Wall Instructor and Climbing Wall Development Instructor. Reflecting on experience is an important part of an instructor's development. Although feedback from others can be very useful it is important we can also independently consider our experiences in relation to the desired outcome.

The key aim of undertaking these reflective comments is to identify and reflect on areas of practice from the relevant Mountain Training qualification syllabus, and supporting guidance notes, where there is a desire or perceived need to reflect on one's personal practice to develop fluency. Being able to effectively analyse experience can be challenging but a few critically analysed sessions are of great value in identifying potential

improvements for the future. When making these comments candidates should ask themselves the following questions and outline their responses:

- What are the desired aims and objectives of the session? What were the actual outcomes of the session?
- What was successful and less successful (reference the relevant Mountain Training syllabus) in your delivery of the session?
- What you would change to improve the outcome?

Your responses can then be added into DLOG in the comments section of the relevant DLOG entry.

Course delivery

Mountain Training courses are delivered by approved providers throughout the UK and Ireland. Providers of Rock Climbing Instructor courses will appoint a course director for each course.

Courses can be found by searching on the Candidate Management System (tahdah) or on our website.

Your training and assessment result will be recorded on your account.

Exemption from training

Experienced climbers who already have substantial personal climbing experience and experience of supervising groups on climbing walls may apply for exemption from training. To qualify for exemption candidates must, at the very least, meet the minimum experience requirements for attendance at an assessment course and demonstrate that they have received relevant training in the management of climbing groups and assistants.

Further details of the exemption process can be found on the Mountain Training website.

There is no exemption from assessment.

Further experience

Once you have passed the Rock Climbing Instructor assessment you are responsible for remaining current and up to date with good practice for as long as you are using your qualification. Mountain Training would like to encourage you to regularly dedicate some time to your development both as a climber and as a Rock Climbing Instructor.

The Mountain Training Association (MTA) is a membership association designed to support both trainee and qualified candidates by providing access to developmental workshops, conferences and peer learning events among other member benefits.

The responsibility for ensuring that leaders receive refresher training must lie with the provider of the service, or the individual in the case of self-employed leaders. Rock Climbing Instructors who wish to operate beyond the scope of their qualification(s) by virtue of their additional experience and/or training, for example a Rock Climbing Instructor taking a group climbing at a sport climbing quarry, may be enabled to do so either through in-house training and/or within the context of a site specific qualification.

Mountain Training publishes a digital document called the National Guidelines which provides advice on good practice for anyone with a responsibility for climbing, walking and mountaineering related activities, and encompassing the principles of safety management.

Mountain Training Association

Our association is a membership organisation that can help you as you work towards one of our qualifications.

As a membership association we are building a community of confident and expert leaders, instructors and coaches, that we hope you will join.

We can help you with:

- Big savings on clothing and equipment
- A wide range of accredited development workshops, events and opportunities for continuing personal/professional development
- Specialist mentoring for your qualification
- Regional networks and opportunities to build connections with others in the sector
- The Professional Mountaineer magazine offering advice, tips and guidance from experts and peers within the profession
- Specially negotiated rates for liability insurance for qualified members

Anyone can join from the moment they register for a Mountain Training qualification, and can join anytime when working towards a qualification or when qualified.

Join via your account on the Mountain Training Candidate Management System (Tahdah – CMS).

"The workshops I've done have been brilliant and have definitely made me a better leader" Alex, Association member.

"The Association offers an excellent range of CPD, which has given me a broader understanding of the role, skills and expertise required to be a great leader. Definitely recommend." Charlie, Association member.